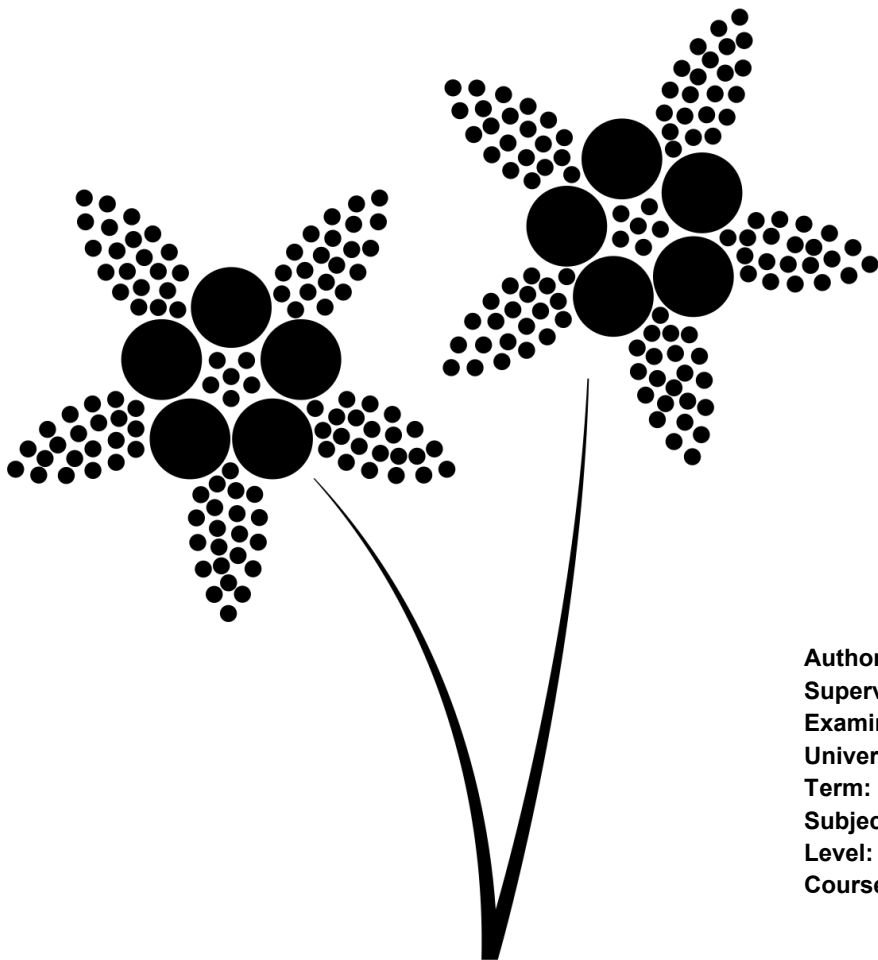


War and Press

Swedish Coverage of Soviet Union during World War II on Eastern Front, 1941 - 1945

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Abstract

This thesis presents the results of a study on the coverage of the Soviet Union during the Second World War by two Swedish newspapers, *Smålandsposten* and *Socialdemokraten*, which was later renamed *Morgontidningen*. The analysis focused on four key events of the war on the Eastern Front: Operation Barbarossa, the Battle of Moscow, the Battle of Stalingrad, and the Battle of Berlin. The study applies framing theory, which describes how the media portray reality by highlighting certain aspects and assigning them particular significance, thereby influencing perceptions of the surrounding world. The method used was qualitative text analysis, through which articles and texts from 25 issues of *Smålandsposten* and 23 issues of *Socialdemokraten/Morgontidningen* were examined.

The results show that the newspapers presented different images of the Soviet Union during the war, and that these images changed over time. The political orientations of the newspapers and developments on the Eastern Front played a significant role in shaping the representation of the Soviet Union in the Swedish press.

Keywords

World War II, Sweden, Soviet Union, Press, *Smålandsposten*, *Socialdemokraten*

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1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Purpose and research questions.....	2
1.2	Delimitations.....	3
2	Theoretical framework.....	5
2.1	Framing theory.....	5
2.2	Previous research.....	7
3	Methodological framework.....	13
3.1	Source material and source criticism.....	15
4	Background.....	19
4.1	The Eastern front and Soviet war effort.....	19
4.2	Sweden during World War II.....	20
4.3	Swedish press and the war.....	22
4.4	Sweden and Russia.....	24
5	Empirical main study.....	27
5.1	Smålandsposten.....	27
5.1.1	Operation Barbarossa.....	27
5.1.2	Battle of Moscow.....	28
5.1.3	Battle of Stalingrad.....	30
5.1.4	Battle of Berlin.....	32
5.2	Socialdemokraten/Morgontidningen.....	34
5.2.1	Operation Barbarossa.....	34
5.2.2	Battle of Moscow.....	36
5.2.3	Battle of Stalingrad.....	38
5.2.4	Battle of Berlin.....	40
6	Analysis and discussion.....	42
7	Conclusion.....	47
8	List of sources and literature.....	48
8.1	Empirical material.....	48
8.2	Literature.....	48
8.3	Digital literature.....	51

1 Introduction

During wars, the mass media play a very important role in society. They can serve as a means of mobilization, intimidation, and influence.¹ Propaganda controls what and how we see, while media shape the ways people perceive the world and interact. Media has the power to construct societies and nations, model space and time, and connect distant places, which is why their attributes are actively employed by the belligerent parties during wartime.²

World war II was fought not only on the battlefields, but also in the mass media and propagand, in a struggle for the hearts and sympathies of the people. In this period, propaganda asserted itself to such an extent that its scale and intensity eclipsed all previous conflicts. It was a war of mass societies and political ideologies, in which propaganda became a key weapon. All forms of communication in countries engaged in war, including art and culture, were subject to strict censorship and were used for propagandistic purposes.³ This ideological struggle and its consequences were bound to transform the cultural, political, and social landscape of Europe.

During the war, Sweden found itself in a difficult position as it sought to maintain neutrality. The country's primary objectives were to preserve national sovereignty and to avoid direct military confrontation. Throughout the war, Sweden pursued foreign policy cooperation with both Germany and the Allied coalition, which also had an impact on the press. Wartime censorship, self-censorship, and political affiliations within the press limited and guided how international events could be presented to the Swedish public.

¹ Messinger, Gary S. (2011). *The Battle for the Mind: War and Peace in the Era of Mass Communication*. University of Massachusetts Press. p. ix - xi

² Uricchio, W. (1999). Media and war... beyond propaganda. The media's potential to serve as weapons systems. In *Tijdschrift voor mediageschiedenis*. 2(2), 160 - 169, p. 162 - 163

³ Welch, David. (2023). The Culture of War: Ideas, Arts, and Propaganda. In Richard Overly (ed.) *The Oxford History of World War II*. Oxford University Press. P. 347 - 348

The Soviet Union was a key participant in the war, defeating Nazi Germany. Historians estimate that 80 percent of all combat operations during World War II took place on the Eastern Front. This war exacted a heavy toll on the Soviet Union and its people.⁴ During the war years, the Scandinavian countries treated the Soviet Union with both admiration and distrust.⁵

Despite extensive research on Sweden's neutrality and wartime politics, there is still a need for more detailed analyses of how specific international actors were represented in the Swedish press over time. While several studies have examined Swedish attitudes toward Nazi Germany or the Western Allies, the Soviet Union has often been treated more indirectly or as part of broader discussions of foreign policy. Moreover, few studies have systematically compared newspapers with differing political orientations in order to identify variations in their portrayal of the USSR during key moments of the war.

This study seeks to address this gap by analysing how the Soviet Union was covered in the Swedish press during four decisive events on the Eastern Front between 1941 and 1945: the start of Operation Barbarossa, the Battle of Moscow, the Battle of Stalingrad, and the Battle of Berlin. By focusing on these events, the study makes it possible to examine both continuity and change in press coverage over time, as well as to compare how different newspapers interpreted the same events.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

The aim of the study is to analyse the coverage of the Soviet Union in the Swedish press, using four key events of World War II on the Eastern Front from 1941 to 1945 as an example: the start of Operation Barbarossa, the Battle of Moscow, the Battle of Stalingrad and the Battle of Berlin.

⁴ Roberts, Geoffrey. (w. y.). *Stalin's victory? The Soviet Union and World War II*. History Ireland. Available at: <https://historyireland.com/stalins-victory-the-soviet-union-and-world-war-ii/>

⁵ Roslyng-Jensen, Palle. (2012). From World War to Cold War: Scandinavian media attitudes to the Soviet Union 1945–1948. *Scandinavian Journal of History*. 37(4), p. 527

The research questions that this study aims to answer is as follows:

1. How did Swedish newspapers cover four key military events on the Eastern Front?
2. How did coverage of the USSR change during different periods of the war and in relation to key military events?
3. What differences can be identified between newspapers of different political persuasions?

1.2 Delimitations

This study has several limitations that prevent it from conducting a thorough and controlled analysis. First, it is limited to the period 1941–1945, that is, from the German invasion of the Soviet Union until the end of World War II in Europe. The focus is on four key military events on the Eastern Front: Operation Barbarossa, the Battle of Moscow, the Battle of Stalingrad, and the Battle of Berlin. These events serve as analytical points of contact and are used to compare changes in coverage over time. The choice of these specific events is motivated by the fact that the first reflects the beginning of the war, while the second represents a crucial battle for the capital and the first major defeat of Nazi Germany. The Battle of Stalingrad is seen as a turning point, and the Battle of Berlin as the collapse of the Nazi regime. In addition, the events were chosen because they received a lot of attention from the international press and likely had a significant impact on Swedish media.

The analysis will focus on texts such as news articles, editorials, and foreign commentary. Genres such as advertising, editorials, visual materials, satire, and cultural articles are not included, as they follow different communicative logics and do not necessarily reflect the newspaper's official position. By focusing on editorial content, the study can better understand how newspapers actively shaped their views on the Soviet Union.

The analysis is also limited thematically. This study will focus on the coverage and portrayal of the Soviet Union. Other actors in World War II, such as Germany, the Axis powers, Great Britain, and the United States, are not the focus of this study. If other countries are considered, it will only be to the extent that they are relevant to understanding how the image of the Soviet Union is constructed. This thesis does not aim to analyse Swedish foreign policy or public opinion overall, although these issues constitute an important part of the context.

Finally, the methodological limitation of the paper is to qualitative text analysis. This indicates that instead of concentrating on numerical measurements of the scope or frequency of articles, the focus will be on narrative structures, values, interpretations and language use. Because of this, no quantitative representativeness is required. It is possible to do a more thorough analysis of how different newspapers expressed their positions and how these changed over time, but the limitation also means that the results cannot be generalized to the entire press industry.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Framing theory

Framing theory addresses the influence of the media on political communication and is one of the most widely used theories in media research. In its first formulation, the theory examines how the media's depiction of various aspects of reality affects people's perceptions. In its second formulation, it focuses on how the media, by portraying reality in a particular way, reproduce and disseminate the ways in which different centers of power and ideologies perceive reality. In its third formulation, framing theory examines media content and what it represents.⁶

Entman writes that the concept of framing describes how texts influence human consciousness through information transmitted from one source to another, including speech, statements, and news reports.⁷ Framing means designing or presenting something in a particular way, and originally the framing concept had nothing to do with the media. News is often assumed to be a mirror reflection of reality, and through participation in journalism people are thought to gain knowledge of reality—an assumption that underlies journalism's role as an informational source and the descriptive power of the media. However, research does not support this thesis.⁸

Due to the constraints of media formats, any news story is inevitably the result of editorial selection—of topics, perspectives, sources, facts, and wording. Most journalistic decisions are not consciously made but follow established editorial routines and therefore appear self-evident. Even the very understanding of what constitutes news is based on institutionalized values and ideology. Journalism is inevitably connected with choice—including the choice to ignore alternatives.

⁶ Strömbäck, J. (2014). *Makt, medier och samhälle: en introduktion till politisk kommunikation*. 2 edition. Studentlitteratur., p. 113

⁷ Entman, Robert M. (1993). Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication*. 43(4). p. 51 – 58., p. 51 - 52

⁸ Strömbäck 2014, p. 113

News should therefore be understood as a (re)construction or representation of reality.⁹

There is always a relationship between reality and its media representation, but the two never fully coincide. The media do not simply describe the world; they select, interpret, and structure it, and the degree of correspondence between reality and the news image is a matter for empirical analysis. What matters are the images of reality in the news, not reality itself. The more people depend on the media for information, the more susceptible they are to media influence.¹⁰

Framing involves selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of reality in a text in order to define a problem, diagnose its causes, provide a moral evaluation, and suggest possible solutions. Frames thus diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe interpretations of events, such as the “Cold War” frame, which structured perceptions of international conflicts.¹¹

Frames operate in at least four locations within the communication process: the communicator, the text, the recipient, and culture. Communicators make decisions based on frames that shape their beliefs. Text analysis focuses on the presence or absence of key words, stock phrases, and sources of information that form thematic clusters of facts or judgments. The frames guiding the recipient’s thinking and conclusions may or may not reflect the frames contained in the text, as well as the communicator’s intentions. Culture consists of a repertoire of frequently used frames that manifest themselves in the discourse and thinking of members of a social group. The framing in four locations encompasses analogous functions: selection and emphasis, utilizing the highlighted parts to formulate an argument regarding issues and their cause, assessment, and/or resolution.¹²

Texts can increase the salience of information through placement, repetition, or association with cultural symbols. Even a single mention of a concept in a

⁹ Strömbäck 2014, p. 113 - 114

¹⁰ Strömbäck 2014, p. 114 - 115

¹¹ Entman 1993, p. 52

¹² Entman 1993, p. 52 - 53

marginal part of a text can have a noticeable impact if it corresponds to the recipient's existing perceptual schemas. Schemas and related concepts, such as categories and stereotypes, are clusters of ideas that facilitate the interpretation of information. Saliency is a product of the interaction between texts and recipients, and the presence of frames does not guarantee their influence on audience thinking.¹³

2.2 Previous research

One of the key studies of the Swedish press during the Second World War is Axel Moberg's analysis of major high-circulation newspapers, including *Dagens Nyheter*, *Stockholms-Tidningen*, *Göteborgs-Posten*, *Aftonbladet*, and *Svenska Dagbladet*.¹⁴ Moberg examines how these papers reported on the Soviet Union and shows that Swedish newspapers often portrayed Soviet and German actions very differently. Following the 1939 partition of Poland, newspapers described the Soviet-occupied zone in harsh terms, emphasizing rapid Bolshevization, mass deportations, and terror carried out by the GPU and Soviet forces. *Stockholms-Tidningen* and *Svenska Dagbladet* reported large-scale killings affecting all social classes. In contrast, developments in German-occupied Poland were framed more mildly, with headlines referring to "transformations" and the "relocation" of Polish workers rather than repression.¹⁵ During the Winter War, Swedish newspapers strongly favoured Finland. They frequently highlighted Finnish successes and Soviet losses, often in a mocking tone. *Dagens Nyheter* confidently portrayed Soviet military failures, while *Stockholms-Tidningen* circulated reports of alleged Soviet atrocities, including executions, prohibited weapons, and deception. Together with *Svenska Dagbladet*, it even falsely claimed that the USSR had used poison gas. As the war progressed, coverage shifted toward Finnish suffering and the enormous losses of the Red Army. The conflict was increasingly framed as a struggle between Western civilization and "barbaric" Russia, with the Soviet attack on Finland depicted as an invasion of the Western

¹³ Entman 1993, p. 53

¹⁴ Moberg, Axel. (2015). *Ekot av kriget: Hur andra världskriget skildrades i dåtida svenska tidningar*. Instant Book. p. 14

¹⁵ Moberg 2015, p. 79 - 80

cultural sphere.¹⁶ After Germany invaded the Soviet Union, newspapers such as *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* initially assumed that the Red Army would be defeated. Many papers expressed admiration for the Wehrmacht, reflecting both political sympathies and the impact of German propaganda. *Aftonbladet* adopted the most explicitly pro-German stance, publishing an editorial titled “Europe’s War of Liberation,” which portrayed Germany as leading a crusade against Bolshevism and even urged Sweden to abandon neutrality.¹⁷ Early wartime reporting focused on Soviet defeats and the anticipated fall of Moscow, though some articles acknowledged Soviet resistance and military competence.¹⁸ Even as Soviet forces gained momentum and advanced westward in 1943–1944, editorial sympathies remained visible: some headlines framed the Red Army’s advance as a threat, while others emphasized its importance or expressed admiration.¹⁹

Sven Åkesson in his bachelor thesis (kandidatuppsats) examines how the Swedish press covered the major Soviet offensive in summer 1944, focusing on three newspapers: the right-wing *Svenska Dagbladet*, the pro-German liberal *Aftonbladet*, and the communist *Norrskensflamman*.²⁰ *Aftonbladet* concentrated far more on events in the West and, even after the Soviet offensive in Belarus began, kept its main focus there due to reliance on German sources and its pro-German line. This reflected both its antipathy toward the USSR and its liberal pro-German editorial stance.²¹ The paper largely ignored Soviet successes in Belarus, emphasizing instead Finland’s difficult position. Åkesson argues that *Aftonbladet* was gradually moving away from its pro-German stance while becoming more tolerant of the USSR.²² *Norrskensflamman*, by contrast, devoted extensive coverage to Soviet victories, portraying them as decisive for the war and claiming

¹⁶ Moberg 2015, p. 89 - 90

¹⁷ Moberg 2015, p. 178 - 180

¹⁸ Moberg 2015, p. 180 - 181

¹⁹ Moberg 2015, p. 224

²⁰ Åkesson, S. (2021). *Pressens syn på Sovjetunionen under sommaroffensiverna i juni-juli 1944: En studie av rapporteringen i Svenska Dagbladet, Aftonbladet och Norrskensflamman*. Kandidatuppsats. History. Stockholm University. p. 3, 6

²¹ Åkesson 2021, p. 29

²² Åkesson 2021, p. 31 - 32

that the German defeat in Belarus was even more devastating than Stalingrad. *Svenska Dagbladet* published extensive reporting on the front, making it impossible to label it anti-Soviet. The paper expressed surprise at the German collapse in Belarus, giving less attention to the Red Army's actions. Although not pro-German, it still showed some trust in the German army while noting its deterioration. It acknowledged Soviet successes but attributed them to both Soviet strength and German weakness, and it criticized Soviet policy toward Finland and Poland.²³

Johan Kihlblom examines in his thesis "Fredsälskande barbarer" how the newspaper *Jönköpings-Posten* presented the USSR during this period and whether its coverage contained Russophobic tendencies. It also examines how coverage changed over time and whether publications reflected economic and military fluctuations, or whether the image of the Soviet Union remained stable regardless of events.²⁴ The results showed a clearly one-sided picture: out of 111 news items, 54 contained hostile assessments, 30 were neutral, and only 27 were positive. The share of friendly representations of the USSR was 24%. Sources opposed to the Soviet Union were significantly more common in *Jönköpings-Posten* than those with positive views. An interesting example is the coverage of Operation Barbarossa. In the first two days, reports contained ten friendly and ten hostile images of the USSR. However, after Finland's entry into the war, hostile images became predominant. Despite a large amount of material on the fall of Nazi Germany, it focuses primarily on other participants in the war, not the Soviet Union. Coverage of the Battle of Stalingrad, however, is surprisingly limited—though existing publications emphasize its scale and significance.²⁵ Regarding Russophobia, there is no definitive answer, but some *Jönköpings-Posten* reports reflect a Russophobic nature. This Russophobic nature is evident in articles covering the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Winter War, and

²³ Åkesson 2021, p. 32 - 33

²⁴ Kihlblom, J. (2019) *Fredsälskande barbarer: En studie om Jönköpings-Postens gestaltning av Sovjetunionen under det andra världskriget*. Självständigt arbete på grundnivå (yrkesexamen). History. Högskolan i Jönköping. p. 4

²⁵ Kihlblom 2019, p. 32

Operation Barbarossa. The author of the study is most surprised by the complete absence of materials conveying the Soviet point of view at the end of the war. This silence in itself may indicate how the editorial board of *Jönköpings-Posten* treated the Soviet Union.²⁶

Albert Hallenborg studied the wartime reporting of the newspaper *Dagsposten* during the Second World War. The author sought to determine how the newspaper was biased in favour of Germany and its Axis allies.²⁷ The study notes that one of the topics toward which the newspaper was particularly biased was the communist threat. Of the 235 biased articles examined, 93 deal with this theme.²⁸ *Dagsposten* was an anti-communist newspaper, which is confirmed by a number of articles. Germany was portrayed as the defender of Sweden and all of Europe from communism and Bolshevik oppression. The Soviet Union, in turn, was described in terms such as “threat,” “danger,” and “madness.” According to the paper, the Soviet Union sought to seize Eastern Europe as well as Scandinavia, including Sweden and Finland, with the consent of Britain. The newspaper uses accusatory rhetorical questions, pushing the reader to accept the inevitability of a German victory. In the article “The Destruction of Finland – the Goal of the Soviets,” it is claimed that the USSR aims to destroy Finland and Sweden, and that Germany is their only protector. It is also stated that, for the sake of peace in Europe, the Bolsheviks must be eliminated and Russia divided.²⁹ The description of the Battle of Stalingrad in *DN* and *SvD* remains mostly neutral and factual: they mention both Germany’s early successes and its subsequent defeats. *Dagsposten*, by contrast, almost always presents a positive picture of the German situation, even when they suffer serious losses. Germany’s retreat is reinterpreted by *Dagsposten* as a temporary tactic or even part of a plan, while the turning point of the war is explained by an anticipated “secret weapon.” Defeats are presented as strategic manoeuvres preceding a future victory. At the same time, the reader is

²⁶ Kihlblom 2019, p. 35 - 36

²⁷ Hallenborg, A. (2022). *Dagspostens krigsrapportering i Sverige under andra världskriget: En studie om vinklad information*. C-uppsats. History. Umeå university. p. 4

²⁸ Hallenborg 2022, p. 15

²⁹ Hallenborg 2022, p. 18 - 19

reminded that, according to the newspaper, a German collapse would mean Soviet domination of Europe and a threat to Swedish culture, economy, and freedom.³⁰

Palle Roslyng-Jensen, in his article, discusses the attitude of Scandinavian media toward the Soviet Union, which developed after the end of the Second World War. In the postwar era, an increase in Soviet influence in Northern Europe was anticipated, as Soviet troops were located in neighbour region. Public opinion was characterized by both admiration for Soviet victories and fear or distrust of the USSR.³¹ Scandinavian newspapers supported their countries' policies of rapprochement with the Soviet Union and the West. In Scandinavia, states maintained control and issued guidelines on reporting diplomatic relations.³² In 1945–1946, part of the Scandinavian press held a strongly favourable stance toward the USSR. In Denmark, Ejnar Skov of *Politiken* initially justified the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states and Eastern Poland, portraying Stalin's policies as democratic. In Norway, *Arbeiderbladet* published materials close to Soviet propaganda.³³ In February–March 1946, overt criticism of the Soviet Union began to appear in conservative newspapers, prompted by Soviet foreign policy. In these publications, the Soviet Union was portrayed as an aggressor. In 1946, *Dagens Nyheter*, under Herbert Tingsten, adopted a more critical line toward the USSR, particularly against the backdrop of a trade agreement with Moscow and the extradition of Baltic refugees. In Norway, open criticism appeared more slowly: *Aftenposten* was the first to cautiously distance itself from its previous positive tone by publishing texts by Teo Findal, interned in the USSR, although formally still supporting the policy of rapprochement. By late 1946–early 1947, criticism of the Soviet Union had noticeably intensified in the Danish and Swedish press and increasingly targeted the Soviet system itself.³⁴ After 1946, *Aftonbladet*, despite the growing criticism of the USSR, published materials emphasizing the peaceful nature of Soviet foreign policy. The newspaper spoke

³⁰ Hallenborg 2022, p. 20 - 21

³¹ Roslyng-Jensen 2012, p. 527

³² Roslyng-Jensen 2012, p. 529

³³ Roslyng-Jensen 2012, p. 530 - 531

³⁴ Roslyng-Jensen 2012, p. 532 - 533

favourably of Stalin and was sceptical of American distrust. At the same time, the newspaper was not communist, if only because it referred to Stalin as a dictator and reported on social problems in Russia.³⁵

The above overview shows that the attitude of the Swedish press toward the Soviet Union was generally negative, except in those newspapers whose political orientation was left-wing or communist. There was a tendency in the press to place greater trust in the German side of the conflict than in the Soviet one. However, after the war, many newspapers in Scandinavia displayed a more positive attitude toward the Soviet Union, as demonstrated in Roslyng-Jensen's article.

This study focuses on four key events of the war on the Eastern Front, as well as on two newspapers with different political orientations and statuses: one published in the capital and serving as the organ of the ruling party, the other a regional newspaper. The aim of this research is to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how the Soviet Union was represented in Swedish public discourse over time. It also highlights how changing military realities influenced journalistic interpretations and political positioning.

³⁵ Roslyng-Jensen 2012, p. 534

3 Methodological framework

The evaluation of scientific results depends primarily on the method used and reported by the author in their study. A more stringent requirement of transparency is that any reader should be able to reproduce the study based on the method's description. This is called intersubjective verifiability, which is considered a key criterion for scientific validity, but does not in itself make a study scientific. Not only is the reporting of the procedure important, but also the quality of the entire research approach.³⁶ In research, it is also necessary to link the research method to the question, because formulating hypotheses establishes a connection between the questions and the study. In this way, we base our assumptions on empirically testable ones.³⁷

The requirement for transparency is universal, although it manifests itself differently in different research approaches. It means that the researcher must clearly explain the methods they chose and why. Why, for example, did they use interviews rather than document analysis? Why did they choose these particular informants? How does the chosen theory influence the research assumptions? What potential errors are associated with the chosen methods, data, and analytical strategy?³⁸

In this paper, the method used to study newspaper publications is qualitative text analysis. Qualitative research uses methods to understand phenomena in their context and interpret their meaning. As Denzin and Lincoln note, "qualitative" means focusing on properties, processes, and meanings that cannot be quantified.³⁹ In his book, Repstad writes that qualitative methods are aimed at characterization. "Qualitative" refers to qualities, that is, the characteristics or characteristic features of a phenomenon.⁴⁰ Qualitative methods are often

³⁶ Florén, Anders, Ågren, Henrik, Erlandsson, Susanna. (2018). *Historiska undersökningar: Grunder i historisk teori, metod och framställningssätt*. (Third edition), Studentlitteratur, p. 49

³⁷ Florén et al. 2018, p. 52

³⁸ Justensen, L. & Mik-Meyer, N. (2011) *Kvalitativa metoder: Från vetenskapsteori till praktik*. S. Andersson. Transl.; First edition, Studentlitteratur, p. 32 - 33

³⁹ Justensen & Mik-Meyer 2011

⁴⁰ Repstad, Pål. (2007). *Närhet och distans: Kvalitativa metoder i samhällsvetenskap*. Björn Nilsson, Transl.; Fourth edition. Studentlitteratur, p. 13

contrasted with quantitative methods, with measurements considered secondary. However, it's impossible to completely eliminate numbers and quantitative formulations, as even qualitative research includes them to some extent.⁴¹ Quantitative methods rely on numbers for analysis, while qualitative methods rely on text. Even if the researcher observes people, events, and environments, these observations are inevitably recorded in field notes and become textual material. The same applies to interviews: spontaneous conversations or prepared conversations are transcribed and transformed into text, which then becomes the basis for analysis.⁴²

Qualitative methods also include text analysis, where the central object of the study is textual material.⁴³ Text analysis is a hermeneutic perspective, which means that the historian considers the text's language, purpose, author, the context in which it was written, and so on. The researcher puts themselves in the author's shoes, attempts to understand their experiences and reconstruct the thought process that led to the text's creation. This is an essential element of hermeneutic understanding. The same approach can be applied to non-written materials, although their understanding is usually more limited.⁴⁴ The hermeneutic approach has particularly advanced text analysis: its goal is not verification of authenticity, but interpretation. It views the document, including the narrative, as a kind of relic. However, such an interpretation can still have source-critical consequences.⁴⁵ Text analysis cannot be reduced to a single template, because each text is unique; even with the same source material, authors create different versions. Therefore, the analytical model must be flexible and take into account the individual characteristics of the statement, even within the framework of news production.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Repstad 2007, p. 14

⁴² Repstad 2007, p. 14

⁴³ Repstad 2007, p. 15

⁴⁴ Dahlgren, Stellan. (1996). Metoder i historisk forskning. In Stellan dahlgren & Anders Florén, *Fråga det förflutna: En introduktion till modern historieforskning*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, p. 193

⁴⁵ Dahlgren 1996, p. 194

⁴⁶ Lundgren, Kristina, Ney, Birgitta, Thurén, Torsten. (1999). *Nyheter – att läsa tidningstext*. Stockholm: Ordfront, p. 53 - 54

Qualitative research is well-suited for providing a detailed description of "what exists." Qualitative research typically provides a solid foundation for understanding local phenomena. By observing a specific environment over time, the researcher gains a direct understanding of the interactions and influences within it. Such studies typically focus on limited and specific contexts and strive for a comprehensive description of the processes and characteristics occurring there.⁴⁷

3.1 Source material and source criticism

The foundation of the present study consists of articles from the newspapers *Smålandsposten* and *Socialdemokraten*, published between 1941 and 1945 during the aforementioned battles on the Eastern Front. The examined issues were published during the following periods: from 22 June to 1 July 1941, from 1 October to 29 December 1941, from 23 August 1942 to 2 February 1943, and from 17 April to 10 May 1945. The study is based on 25 issues of *Smålandsposten* and 23 issues of *Socialdemokraten/Morgontidningen*. The texts belong to the genres of news articles, editorial columns, correspondence, and analytical pieces.

Although both newspapers present data from both the Soviet and German sides. Attention should be paid to how this information is presented to the reader and how the balance of sources is established.

The newspaper materials analyzed in this study were obtained from two different cultural and archival institutions. Issues of *Smålandsposten* in their original printed format are preserved at the Kulturarvscentrum Småland, while copies of *Socialdemokraten* (later *Morgontidningen*) are available in microfilm form and are held at the Lund University Library.

The use of original printed issues of *Smålandsposten* allows direct access to the layout, typography and contextual placement of articles within the newspaper. However, some copies were damaged or creased, which may result in the loss of some text information. In contrast, the microfilm format of *Socialdemokraten*

⁴⁷ Repstad 2007, p. 21 - 22

reproduces the textual content of the original editions but may in some cases affect readability. Microfilm format was preferred for analysis because it provided a reliable reproduction of the text material and the newspapers filmed were largely undamaged. These differences in format do not influence the qualitative analysis of the texts, but they are considered in the source-critical assessment of the material.

Both archival formats represent established and reliable forms of access to historical newspaper material and are commonly used in academic historical research.

When assessing a newspaper as a historical source, it is important to consider its political orientation and its position within the contemporary historical context, as these factors may influence its degree of political engagement and potential bias.

The newspaper *Socialdemokraten*, which changed its name to *Morgontidningen* in the early 1940s, was founded in 1885 and was closely affiliated with the Swedish Social Democratic Party. Following the Social Democrats' electoral victory in the parliamentary elections of 1932, several journalists from the newspaper's editorial staff assumed positions within the state administration. As a result, *Socialdemokraten* increasingly came to be regarded as closely aligned with government interests, and in some contexts as a semi-official government organ.⁴⁸

During the war years, despite the continued electoral strength of the Social Democratic Party, the government operated as a coalition that included all parliamentary parties except the Communists.^{49 50}

Smålandsposten is a conservative newspaper, published six times a week, which was founded in 1866.⁵¹ During the war, the newspaper remained loyal to the

⁴⁸ Gardeström, Elin. (2017). Tidningen Social-Demokraten mellan politik och marknad. In *Presshistorisk årsbok 2017*, p. 81 - 82

⁴⁹ Hedenborg, Susanna, Kvarnström, Lars. (2023). *Det svenska samhället: Böndernas och arbetarnas tid 1720 – 2022*. (7th edition). Studentlitteratur, p. 350

⁵⁰ Gustafsson, Harald. (2017). *Nordens historia: En europeisk region under 1200 år*. (Third edition). Studentlitteratur, p. 253

⁵¹ *Nationalencyklopedin*. (1995), Smålandsposten. Vol. 17. Höganäs: Bokförlaget Bra Böcker, p. 9

coalition government and adhered to the state-imposed limits on press freedom, avoiding topics considered politically sensitive in relation to Germany. The editorial staff justified this caution by referring to responsibility toward the country and the need to restrain emotional and unverified criticism.⁵²

Owing to its factual and restrained tone, as well as its extensive coverage of international events, *Smålandsposten* nevertheless attracted increased attention and expanded its readership during the war years. The establishment of agreements with its own foreign correspondents further strengthened the newspaper's reputation and enhanced the perceived value of its international reporting.⁵³

Among the material from *Smålandsposten* examined in this study are also publications by Gunnar Franzen, the newspaper's editor-in-chief from 1934 to 1966.⁵⁴ He wrote on foreign affairs; his texts were printed in two columns across two pages and were signed with the byline “-r-n.” News was often presented by juxtaposing opposing viewpoints and by using cautious wording in headlines, in order to emphasize distance from propagandistic sources and to allow readers to compare different versions for themselves.⁵⁵

It should be noted that Franzen held a negative view of the Soviet Union and the regime in power there. During the Winter War, he sympathized with Finland. Even after the turning point of the war on the Eastern Front, his negative attitude toward Bolshevism persisted.⁵⁶

When studying and analyzing sources, it should be taken into account that we are dealing with material whose genre belongs to journalism. Journalism is generally regarded as having the task of providing truthful information about events, people,

⁵² Torbacke, Jarl. (1991). *Smålandsposten och världen*. In Stig Tornehed (ed.) *Smålandsposten: En tidnings 125-åriga historia*. Smålandsposten AB, p. 136

⁵³ Torbacke 1991, p. 136

⁵⁴ Projekt Runeberg. (u.å.). *Gunnar Franzén*. Available at: <https://runeberg.org/authors/franzgun.html> (2026-01-21)

⁵⁵ Torbacke 1991, p. 138

⁵⁶ Torbacke 1991, p. 139

and places. Journalists are expected to convey what they have seen and heard as it is.⁵⁷ However, journalists do not report everything. They focus on what is unexpected, new, or has occurred recently. In doing so, journalism seeks to attract attention. The media present events in a dramatic form, with clear conflicts, heroes, and outcomes, in order to engage the audience.⁵⁸ Journalism is based on reality and real events, but in striving to make them understandable and interesting for the audience, it inevitably processes and structures the material, which leads to a distortion of reality.⁵⁹

Articles published in close temporal proximity to the four major military events examined in this study were prioritized when choosing the source material. Both news articles and editorials were included in order to capture not only factual reporting but also editorial interpretations. The selection does not aim to be exhaustive but is intended to provide a representative sample suitable for qualitative analysis.

The limited number of newspapers and articles analysed means that the findings cannot be generalised to the entire Swedish press, but they nevertheless provide insight into dominant patterns of interpretation within different political contexts.

⁵⁷ Hultén, Lars J. (1993). *Journalistikens villkor: Om plikten att informera och lusten att berätta*. Natur och kultur, p. 23

⁵⁸ Hultén 1993, p. 30

⁵⁹ Hultén 1993, p. 20

4 Background

4.1 The Eastern front and Soviet war effort

The German attack on the Soviet Union took place on 22 June 1941 and entered history as Operation Barbarossa, thereby violating the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. The attack was sudden; the Red Army was unprepared for the German offensive and suffered defeats, incurring heavy human and territorial losses.⁶⁰ The advance was delayed during the Battle of Smolensk, where the Red Army put up fierce resistance.⁶¹

On 30 September 1941, the Wehrmacht launched its offensive against Moscow, known as Operation Typhoon.⁶² The advance was halted in mid-November without the capital being taken.⁶³ On 5 December, Soviet forces began a counteroffensive, the first phase of which was successful.⁶⁴ From 8 January to 20 April 1942, a further offensive was conducted during which the Wehrmacht was pushed back by approximately 60 - 155 miles.⁶⁵

In the summer of 1942, Hitler set the objective of capturing the oil fields of the Caucasus, which he considered decisive for the war.⁶⁶ In July, the Wehrmacht launched Operation Blue to achieve this goal. On 21 August, German forces crossed the Don and broke through to the Volga. On 23 August, Stalingrad was subjected to a brutal bombardment during which the city was devastated.⁶⁷ The capture of the city became a top priority for the Wehrmacht.⁶⁸

The ruins of the city turned into a battlefield. In October and November, fighting continued block by block. German soldiers referred to this type of combat as “rat

⁶⁰ Harrison, Dick. (2022). *Andra världskriget. Historiska Media*, p. 87

⁶¹ Beevor, Antony (2012). *The Second World War*. Phoenix, p. 240

⁶² Braithwaite, R. (2007). *Moscow 1941: A City and its People at War*. Profile Books, p. 211

⁶³ Braithwaite 2007, p. 294

⁶⁴ Braithwaite 2007, p. 304, 320

⁶⁵ Braithwaite 2007, p. 340

⁶⁶ Beevor, Antony (2000). *Stalingrad*. Transl. Ulf Irheden. Historiska Media, p. 82

⁶⁷ Beevor 2000, p. 114 - 116

⁶⁸ Beevor 2000, p. 133

war.”⁶⁹ On 19 November, the Red Army launched a counteroffensive known as Operation Uranus, during which all German divisions in Stalingrad were encircled.⁷⁰ In early 1943, the German army in Stalingrad was destroyed, and its commander, Paulus, was taken prisoner.

After the Battle of Stalingrad came the Battle of Kursk in 1943 and Operation Bagration in 1944, which decided the outcome of the war on the Eastern Front.⁷¹ Following the Soviet offensive in Belarus, campaigns were launched across Eastern Europe, culminating in the advance on Berlin in the spring of 1945.

The Battle of Berlin marked the final major military operation on the Eastern Front and took place in April and early May 1945. Following a series of successful offensives in Eastern Europe, the Red Army advanced towards the German capital, which was encircled by Soviet forces in late April.⁷² After intense fighting within the city, Berlin capitulated on 2 May 1945, effectively bringing an end to the war in Europe.⁷³ The capture of Berlin symbolised the definitive defeat of Nazi Germany and confirmed the Soviet Union as the dominant military power on the Eastern Front.

4.2 Sweden during World War II

The Second World War began on 1 September 1939 with Germany’s attack on Poland. On that day, Swedish Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson, in a radio address to the nation, stated that Sweden’s goal was to keep the country out of the war and that the nation was prepared to defend itself by force of arms.⁷⁴ In December 1939, Sweden reached an agreement with Great Britain on re-export restrictions with minimal controls, which indirectly increased its dependence on Germany. Under German pressure, it then agreed on iron ore supplies and, in

⁶⁹ Frankson, A. (2023). *Achtung Panzer! Stalingrad och Charkov - två slag som förändrade andra världskriget*. Lind & Co, p. 83

⁷⁰ Frankson 2023, p. 114

⁷¹ Harrison 2022, p. 154

⁷² Beevor, Antony (2002). *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*. Viking, p. 296

⁷³ Ryan, Cornelius (1966). *Slutstriden: Slaget om Berlin 16 april – 2 maj 1945*. Transl. Gunnar Barklund. Stockholm: Bonniers. p. 298

⁷⁴ Berggren, H. (2023). *Landet utanför: Sverige och kriget 1939 – 1940*. Norstedts, p. 80

January 1940, reached a pragmatic agreement with Berlin, managing to maintain trade with both sides of the war.⁷⁵

On 9 April 1940, the war reached Scandinavia as the Wehrmacht invaded Denmark and Norway. Hitler sought to establish military bases in Norway as staging grounds for war against Great Britain.⁷⁶ Sweden maintained its policy of neutrality, but the public feared a possible German attack on their country, and the military demanded mobilization.⁷⁷ The Swedish government refused to allow German military transports to pass through its territory and at the same time did not provide support to the Norwegian resistance.⁷⁸ Sweden also refused to grant asylum to the Norwegian king and heir.⁷⁹

Following the defeat of Norway and France in the summer of 1940, Germany's position sharply strengthened, narrowing the scope for Swedish neutrality. Under German pressure, Sweden agreed in July 1940 to allow the transit of German soldiers and military equipment through its territory, including rail transport between Germany and Norway, allowing Berlin to avoid risky sea routes. Great Britain and the Norwegian government-in-exile protested that Sweden had violated Article 2 of the Hague Convention (which prohibits neutral countries from allowing the transit of troops from belligerent countries). Sweden claimed that the war in Norway was over. This was a weak argument and the Swedish government understood it.⁸⁰

After April 1940, Sweden found itself in a state of severe economic dependence: Germany revised its trade terms and controlled coal and coke supplies, while the Allies partially controlled fuel oil supplies. Britain first tightened its blockade, then limited its access to the "Gothenburg traffic," which both sides used to exert

⁷⁵ Gilmour, John (2011). Hitler, Stalin och Sverige: Ett nytt perspektiv på den svenska erfarenheten av andra världskriget. Transl. Kjell Waltman. Santérus Förlag, p. 47 - 48

⁷⁶ Bjereld, U. & Ekengren, A.-M. (2024). *Från neutralitet till NATO: Svensk utrikespolitik under 200 år*. Studentlitteratur, p. 50

⁷⁷ Berggren 2023a, p. 319, 322

⁷⁸ Bjereld & Ekengren 2024, p. 50 - 51

⁷⁹ Gilmour 2011, p. 57

⁸⁰ Bjereld & Ekengren 2024, p. 51

pressure on Sweden. This resource dependence seriously limited the Swedish government's flexibility and influenced its foreign policy.⁸¹

On June 22, 1941, after Germany invaded the USSR and Finland entered the war, Sweden found itself in an extremely vulnerable position. Under intense pressure from Berlin, the government, despite its awareness of the violation of neutrality, agreed to the transit of the German Engelbrecht Division through Swedish territory to Finland. This decision, made at the height of the "Midsummer Crisis," was accompanied by other concessions to Germany.⁸²

Already in 1942–1943, foreign policy began to shift in a more West-friendly direction, and German pressure weakened.⁸³ Sweden halted transit traffic and, on 23 September 1943, concluded a trade agreement with the United States and Great Britain, reducing deliveries of iron ore and ball bearings to Germany.⁸⁴ In August 1944, military trade with Germany was terminated. From 1943 onward, Sweden trained Danish and Norwegian "police" forces, which in reality constituted light infantry. This military training ran counter to Sweden's policy of neutrality.⁸⁵

4.3 Swedish press and the war

Sweden's vulnerable position as a neutral state limited press freedom: the authorities viewed the press as part of national defense, designed to prevent the country from being drawn into war. Inconsistent and unpredictable controls, dependent on the reactions of the warring parties, forced even loyal newspapers to exercise excessive caution.⁸⁶ The first steps toward voluntary press self-restraint were taken even before the war began, when the government urged editors to exercise caution. Soon after the war began, the authorities formalized controls and

⁸¹ Gilmour 2011, p. 72

⁸² Bjereld & Ekengren 2024, 52 - 53

⁸³ Zetterberg, K. (2021). Sverige och Hitler 1939 – 1945: Ett bidrag till historien om Sverige och Tyskland under andra världskriget. Carlssons, p. 64

⁸⁴ Berggren, H. (2023). Landet utanför: Sverige och kriget 1943 – 1945. Norstedts, p. 150

⁸⁵ Zetterberg 2021, p. 204

⁸⁶ Sandlund, Elisabeth. (2001). Beredskap och repression (1936 - 1945). In Karl Erik Gustafsson & Per Rydén (Ed.). *Den svenska pressens historia III: Det moderna Sveriges spegel (1897 – 1945)*. Ekerlids förlag, p. 268

recommendations for the press to maintain neutrality.⁸⁷ Through the Information Council and a system of "gray notes" (260 in total), the authorities informally directed the press, specifying what could and could not be published. Content covered the economy, defense, domestic politics, and international relations. Later, control was institutionalized through the Press Council, where the editors-in-chief themselves participated in oversight.⁸⁸ The work of the information control bodies was aimed at preventing the publication of information that would undermine Sweden's neutrality. Initially, criminal prosecutions were used as a repressive tool, but later the government adopted other methods, such as bans on transport and the confiscation of books and newspapers. These censorship measures primarily targeted the communist and far-left press, including the anti-Nazi "*Trots allt!*" campaign.⁸⁹ Less than 10 percent of the confiscated newspapers were pro-Nazi.⁹⁰ Admittedly, the newspaper confiscations were not extensive, but they attracted considerable attention. The largest confiscation occurred in March 1942 against 17 newspapers that had published an article about prisoner-of-war conditions in Norway.⁹¹ Measures such as restrictions on press freedom and increased security were partly concessions to Germany and preparation for a possible war. This reflected the desire to prevent communists and nazis from becoming a "fifth column."⁹²

The primary threat to Swedish freedom of speech should be identified as Germany, which conducted a review of press content and lodged diplomatic protests against Sweden. After 1939, the number of German complaints increased, and Berlin declared the Swedish government responsible for information policy and expected Stockholm to maintain a "neutral opinion" (*Gesinnungsneutralität*).⁹³ Germany also conducted campaigns to influence Swedish public opinion to maintain strict neutrality and promised Sweden a privileged position in the

⁸⁷ Sandlund 2001, p. 269

⁸⁸ Sandlund 2001, p. 270 - 272

⁸⁹ Sandlund 2001, p. 273

⁹⁰ Gilmour 2011, p. 185

⁹¹ Zetterberg 2021, p. 32

⁹² Zetterberg 2021, p. 33

⁹³ Gilmour 2011, p. 177 - 178

German Großraum.⁹⁴ At the beginning of the war, German propaganda was more influential than propaganda from all other countries. After the defeat of Norway, Denmark, and France, it assumed a preeminent position.⁹⁵

The second half of the war was characterized by the triumphant advance of Anglo-American propaganda in Sweden. At the end of 1943, Tennant declared that British propaganda in Sweden had achieved its main goals.⁹⁶ Sweden, for its part, began to limit patriotic propaganda, carried out a cultural opening to the West, and ceased criticizing Western propaganda.⁹⁷

4.4 Sweden and Russia

In Swedish collective memory, a negative image of Russia has been entrenched for many centuries. Thus, in the dictionary of the Swedish Academy (SAOB), Russian refers not only to a person's ethnicity but also carries derogatory meanings such as someone who is disobedient, rude, merciless, wild, and unruly.⁹⁸ The notion of a long-standing hostility toward Russia and the image of Russians as barbarians influenced perceptions of the Soviet Union.⁹⁹

The Bolsheviks' rise to power in 1917 provoked mixed reactions among Swedes: some welcomed the fall of tsarist rule, while others feared the new regime as a threat to traditional social foundations. Swedish volunteers took part in the post-revolutionary wars in Estonia and Finland. The Swedish government did not seek confrontation with the new Soviet regime; it recognized it in 1924 and concluded a trade agreement.¹⁰⁰ But the fear of the Bolsheviks was still strong in society. One expression of these fears was a propaganda poster from the "Cossack

⁹⁴ Gilmour 2011, p. 189

⁹⁵ Scholz, M. F. (2020). Sverige under andra världskriget. *Historisk tidskrift*. Vol. 140 (2). p. 253. Available at: <https://www.historisktidskrift.se/index.php/june20/issue/view/3>

⁹⁶ Gilmour 2011, p. 193

⁹⁷ Scholz 2020, p. 254

⁹⁸ Harrison, Dick. (2023). *Fienden: Sveriges relation till Ryssland från vikingatiden till idag*. Ordfront, p. 16 - 17

⁹⁹ Alm, Martin (2005). Den svenska sovjetbilden 1935 – 1947. In: Köll, Anu Mai (ed.) *Kommunismens ansikten: Repression, övervakning och svenska reaktioner*. Stockholm/Stehag: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion, p. 22 - 23

¹⁰⁰ Harrison 2023, p. 276 - 277

elections” of 1928, which depicted peasants being robbed by the Bolsheviks.¹⁰¹ Military circles believed that the only military threat came from the Soviet Union.¹⁰²

In Sweden, the scale of Stalin's repressions and collectivization was poorly understood, while threats from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany undermined the country's sense of security and led to a strengthening of its defenses. Against this backdrop, the USSR moved closer to the West after 1933 and joined the League of Nations.¹⁰³

Attitudes toward the Soviet Union changed after the outbreak of the Winter War in 1939. Swedes feared that Finland would be annexed, and public opinion strongly sided with Finland, as expressed in the slogan “Finland’s cause is ours.” A Swedish Volunteer Corps was organized.¹⁰⁴ In the press, attitudes toward the Soviet Union were harsh, and the war was portrayed as a struggle between David and Goliath.¹⁰⁵

One manifestation of anti-communism occurred on 3 March 1940, when the offices of the communist newspaper *Norrskensflamman* were burned down. Five people were killed, including two children. The newspaper and communists blamed Finnish pilots for the fire, which led to threats against the paper and calls for violence directed at it.¹⁰⁶ The press and journalists ignored the victims and even joked about alleged self-arson. It later emerged that the arson had been carried out by four officers, a conscript, a journalist, and a public prosecutor.¹⁰⁷

Fear of Russia was further intensified during the Second World War and, in certain contexts, aligned with pro-German sentiments.¹⁰⁸ The Swedish

¹⁰¹ Nilsson, Sture. (1990). *Rysskräcken i Sverige: Fördomar och verklighet*. Samspråk., p. 188 - 189

¹⁰² Oredsson, Sverker. (2001). *Svensk rädsla: Offentlig fruktan i Sverige under 1900-talets första hälft*. Nordic Academic Press, p. 142

¹⁰³ Nilsson 1990, p. 189

¹⁰⁴ Nilsson 1990, p. 190

¹⁰⁵ Harrison 2023, p. 286

¹⁰⁶ Nilsson 1990, p. 194 - 195

¹⁰⁷ Harrison 2023, p. 287

¹⁰⁸ Nilsson 1990, p. 190

government was reluctant to assist Finland, which was aligned with Germany.¹⁰⁹ King Gustav V sent congratulatory telegrams to Hitler on the attack on the Soviet Union in 1941. Politicians regarded the Soviet Union as an enemy. Communists came to be viewed as an unreliable element and were barred from holding important positions. During the war, Swedish merchant ships were attacked by Soviet submarines.¹¹⁰ Soviet military aircraft also violated Swedish airspace, leading to bombings, such as in the Mälardalen region on the night of 22–23 February 1944.¹¹¹ At the same time, Soviet military successes lent greater legitimacy to pro-Soviet voices and brought electoral gains for the communists, as seen, for example, in the elections to the Second Chamber of the Riksdag in 1944.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Oredsson 2001, p. 240

¹¹⁰ Harrison 2023, p. 287 - 288

¹¹¹ Harrison 2023, p. 290

¹¹² Nilsson 1990, p. 190

5 Empirical main study

5.1 Smålandsposten

5.1.1 Operation Barbarossa

The 26 June 1941 issue of *Smålandsposten* presents Sweden as an “island of peace” amid war, stressing its vulnerable position between Germany and the USSR and ultimately justifying neutrality. It argues that neither a German victory nor defeat would benefit Sweden, while a Soviet retreat would reduce Nordic threats.¹¹³ In ”Från leende till bävan“ (From Smiles to Dread) Gunnar Franzén depicts the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact as a cynical, temporary deal and explains the German invasion as a strategic, not ideological, move in a broader imperialist power struggle. Reports from Berlin emphasize rapid German advances and air superiority, expressing confidence in a swift victory.¹¹⁴

In issue 101, published on 28 June, the article “Röda krigsmän” (“Red Warriors”) by Franzén discusses the military leadership of the Red Army. Attention is given to the People’s Commissar of Defense, Marshal Semyon Timoshenko, General Georgy Zhukov, and Chief of Staff Kirill Meretskov. Timoshenko is portrayed as a soldier-reformer, while Zhukov is described as a strict and far-sighted commander. The Red Army is depicted as being in the midst of an incomplete modernization: weakened by purges, suffering from a shortage of trained officers, and hampered by an underdeveloped industrial base, despite the bravery of its soldiers.¹¹⁵

The newspaper cites reports on the superiority of German aviation and its significant role in ground operations. The issue also provides Russian data on battles in which the Germans suffered heavy losses. It is reported that Hungary entered the war and that Spanish volunteers were sent to fight Bolshevism.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *Smålandsposten* 1941. Fredens ö i krigets hav. June 26. no. 100, p. 5

¹¹⁴ Franzén, Gunnar 1941. Från leende till bävan. In *Smålandsposten*. June 26. no. 100, p. 8 - 9

¹¹⁵ Franzén, Gunnar 1941. Röda krigsmän. In *Smålandsposten*. June 28. no. 101, p. 8 - 9

¹¹⁶ *Smålandsposten* 1941. Berlin vill ej höra talas om parallell med Napoleons fälttåg. June 28. no. 101, p. 9

Issue 102, dated June 29, broadcast a report from the German High Command on the Wehrmacht's major successes. It also included information about a Soviet communiqué that spoke of the Red Army's successes.¹¹⁷

In issue 103 of July 1, the Berlin press announced Germany's "decisive victory" at the start of the war and claimed that the German offensive had thwarted the supposedly impending Soviet offensive against Europe, thereby "saving" it from the Bolshevik threat.¹¹⁸

In "Ryskt kaos?" (Russian chaos?) Franzen reports that the Wehrmacht is advancing rapidly, while the Red Army faces a crisis with signs of partial chaos. Soviet military failures stem from systemic problems: chaotic transport, inefficient logistics, flawed goods distribution, idle machinery, and industrial waste. Industry is paralyzed by planned economy and party incompetence; working conditions are harsh, wages low, and housing poor. Agriculture suffers from collectivization, outdated equipment, unmet production plans, and undermining by private plots. Franzen concludes that these structural weaknesses will also challenge Germany during occupation, as retreating Soviets deliberately destroy resources.¹¹⁹

5.1.2 Battle of Moscow

In issue no. 162 of 12 October 1941, it is stated, based on military telegrams, that Moscow would fall before Leningrad. The Berlin view on the weakness of Timoshenko's armies is presented, while at the same time Moscow reports fierce resistance along the entire front line. Large reinforcements are being sent to the defence of Moscow. Meanwhile, Berlin remains confident that the Wehrmacht will capture all the important parts of European Russia before the onset of winter.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ *Smålandsposten* 1941. Fortsatta tyska framgångar i kriget på ostfronten. June 29. no. 102, p. 8

¹¹⁸ *Smålandsposten* 1941. Berlin: Ringen kring inneslutna ryska arméer fastare. July 1. no. 102, p. 8 - 9

¹¹⁹ Franzén, Gunnar 1941. Ryskt kaos?. In *Smålandsposten*. July 1. no. 102, p. 8 - 9

¹²⁰ *Smålandsposten* 1941. Marskalk Budjenny lider svårt nederlag vid Azovska sjön. October 12. no. 162, p. 5

Issue no. 164 of 16 October includes a speech by Joseph Goebbels in which the Minister of Propaganda declared that although the war was still ongoing, its outcome was already decided. “The threat from the East has been eliminated,” Goebbels asserted.¹²¹ The newspaper reports that three million Russian soldiers had been taken prisoner and claims that the Soviets had also lost their best reserve forces.¹²² Franzen wrote an observing portraying Moscow as the historical, industrial, and strategic centre of the USSR. He argues that the loss of Moscow would be regarded as a severe blow not only economically but also psychologically. In conclusion, it is emphasised that the fighting on the approaches to the capital is of decisive importance for the outcome of the war.¹²³

In issue no. 165 of 18 October, it is reported that in the fierce battle for Moscow the Germans are encountering stubborn resistance: the city remains a “hard nut to crack,” although the Soviet side acknowledges the seriousness of the situation west of the capital and the enemy’s numerical superiority. The German command avoids mentioning the fighting for Moscow, instead focusing on the capture of Odessa and the advance towards the Don.¹²⁴

In issue no. 177 of 8 November, Stalin’s speech delivered at the parade on 7 November on the occasion of the anniversary of the October Revolution is reported. He acknowledged temporary territorial losses and the threat to Leningrad and Moscow, but emphasised the heroic resistance of the army and the unity of the country. Stalin drew a parallel with 1918, when the situation had been far more difficult, yet the Soviet state had managed to defeat the interventionists. He stated that the country was now stronger, while Germany was becoming exhausted and would be defeated within one year.¹²⁵ The same issue also includes an article by Franzen on the Russian winter and its role in the war. In it, he argues

¹²¹ *Smålandsposten* 1941. Göbbels: Ingen blockad kan nu uthungra Tyskland. October 16. no. 164, p. 8

¹²² *Smålandsposten* 1941. Tyskarna hota Moskva både direkt och indirekt. October 16. no. 164, p. 9

¹²³ Franzén, Gunnar 1941. Moskva. In *Smålandsposten*. October 16. no. 164, p. 8 - 9

¹²⁴ *Smålandsposten* 1941. Moskva är en hård nöt att knäcka för tyskarna. October 18. no. 165, p. 9

¹²⁵ *Smålandsposten* 1941. England lyckönskar Ryssland till bolsjevismens införande. November 8. no. 177, p. 9

that the outcome of the war depends not only on weather conditions but also on the resilience of the Red Army, which remains a dangerous opponent despite its losses.¹²⁶

In issue no. 193 of 6 December, an uncertain situation around Moscow is reported. The Germans do not mention fighting for the capital, while Soviet sources claim that the offensive is being contained in the north-west, but continues west of Moscow and in the Tula sector, where large forces are engaged. The fighting is taking place under conditions of severe frost and snowstorms, involving enormous masses of troops and equipment.¹²⁷

In issue no. 196 of 11 December, it is reported that the Wehrmacht has gone over to the defensive, and that German reports speak only of Russian attacks. A Soviet communiqué reports advances on the central front.¹²⁸

In issue no. 198 of 14 December, the newspaper reports on the continuing offensive of the Red Army. According to *Smålandsposten*, the Soviet press expresses great satisfaction that the threat to Moscow has been eliminated. The German command claims that “hostile local attacks have been repelled,” and that the retreat on the Eastern Front is a pre-planned tactical regrouping for winter quarters.¹²⁹

5.1.3 Battle of Stalingrad

Issue 135 of August 25, 1942, reported that the Wehrmacht had crossed the Don River, signalling the start of what would become a decisive battle for Stalingrad. Soviet leadership admitted that the Germans had established a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Don, worsening the situation on the roads to Stalingrad.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Franzén, Gunnar 1941. Rysk vinter. In *Smålandsposten*. November 8. no. 177, p. 8 - 9

¹²⁷ *Smålandsposten* 1941. Fortsatt tysk reträtt i Ukraina; ovisst vid Moskva. December 6. no. 193, p. 8

¹²⁸ *Smålandsposten* 1941. Tyskarna ha gått över till defensiv i öster. December 11. no. 196, p. 10

¹²⁹ *Smålandsposten* 1941. Den tyska reträtten i Ryssland fortsätter. December 14. no. 198, p. 6

¹³⁰ *Smålandsposten* 1942. Berlin: Den avgörande striden om Stalingrad börjad. August 25. no. 135, p. 6

Issue 136 of August 27 reports that the Wehrmacht, under von Bock, is carrying out a "pincer attack" on the city from the north and south. German tank units are advancing toward the city "with astonishing speed." Fighting is already underway on the approaches to Stalingrad's outer defensive lines. Stalingrad is engulfed in flames after massive German air strikes. On the Volga, German aircraft are already sinking cargo ships and tankers. Moscow is quoted as saying that "the great Battle of Stalingrad eclipses all other fronts."¹³¹

Issue 143 of September 8th reports on the growing intensity of the Battle of Stalingrad. A Moscow radio broadcast calls on Red Army soldiers to fight to the last. The German command, while acknowledging that the Battle of Stalingrad has become akin to the Battle of Verdun due to the Russians fierce resistance, nevertheless remains confident of the city's inevitable fall.¹³²

In issue 153 of September 26, in the article "Dramat i Volga" (The Drama on the Volga), Franzen writes that the Battle of Stalingrad surpassed all historical examples in its brutality. The city is being systematically destroyed by German aircraft and artillery, and the city itself has been turned into a fortress. Workers at Stalingrad factories continue to produce tanks and attack them directly from their workshops. Women build barricades, and civilians live in dugouts, sheltering from the cold and bombs.¹³³

In issue no. 187 of 24 November, *Smålandsposten* reports on the counteroffensive near Stalingrad. The Red Army broke through the German front lines and captured important positions.¹³⁴ In the article "Två överraskningar" (Three surprises), Franzen describes the Soviet counteroffensive as a carefully planned strike, launched at a moment when Hitler had been forced to redeploy air forces to

¹³¹ *Smålandsposten* 1942. Ryssarna kastar tillbaka mellan Don och Stalingrad. August 27. no. 136, p. 8

¹³² *Smålandsposten* 1942. Berlin medger, att Stalingrad artar sig till ett nytt Verdun. September 8. no. 135, p. 8

¹³³ Franzén, Gunnar 1942. Dramat i Volga. In *Smålandsposten*. September 26. no. 135, p. 10 - 11

¹³⁴ *Smålandsposten* 1942. Stalin gör allt för att lätta trycket mot Stalingra. November 24. no. 187, p. 8

the south in order to counter the Anglo-American threat in Africa. He concludes that Stalin outmanoeuvred Hitler by choosing the perfect timing for the attack.¹³⁵

In issue no. 190 of 29 November 1942, it is reported that the Red Army had succeeded in encircling the Axis forces at Stalingrad, when the two “pincers” linked up on the Don south of Kalach. Observers from Britain, whose views are cited, consider the situation critical but not hopeless, provided that the Wehrmacht attempts a breakout. The opinion from Berlin is also presented, denying the encirclement and claiming that all Russian attacks had “collapsed.”¹³⁶

In the 1943 article “Dramat i öster” (Drama in the east), Franzen attributes the Soviet offensive's strength to extreme economic and military mobilization. Drawing on accounts from Major Baltzer and B.H. Norton, he describes a home front defined by "animal-like slavery" and harsh exploitation. This system involved the total mobilization of women, children, and the elderly, who worked exhausting shifts to sustain the war effort. Ultimately, this unprecedented endurance allowed the Soviet Union to compensate for massive military losses and maintain a constant flow of supplies to the front lines.¹³⁷

In issue no. 17 of 2 February 1943, it is reported that the German army at Stalingrad had been defeated and that its commander, Field Marshal General Paulus, had been taken prisoner. The city of Stalingrad itself had been reduced to ruins, to which residents were now beginning to return. The inhabitants are described as exhausted yet still appearing to be in good spirits.¹³⁸

5.1.4 Battle of Berlin

In issue no. 61 of 21 April, it is reported that within a few days Soviet troops had broken through Berlin's outer defensive belt and penetrated the capital's defense zone at two points, a development assessed in Berlin as a critical moment. The

¹³⁵ Franzén, Gunnar 1942. Två överraskningar. In *Smålandsposten*. November 24. no. 187, p. 8 - 9

¹³⁶ *Smålandsposten* 1942. Ryssarna ha stängt till öppningen i Stalingrad-säcken. November 29. no. 190, p. 6

¹³⁷ Franzén, Gunnar 1942. Dramat i öster. In *Smålandsposten*. January 8. no. 3, p. 8 - 9

¹³⁸ *Smålandsposten* 1943. Blott en enda liten tysk grupp kämpar nu i Stalingrad. February 2. no. 18, p. 8

Germans committed their last SS reserves and Volkssturm units to the fighting. The offensive was accompanied by extremely fierce battles and record losses of Soviet tanks. At the same time, Konev's forces advanced in Saxony, cutting communications between Berlin and Dresden and narrowing the corridor between the Eastern and Western fronts.¹³⁹

April 24's issue no. 63 of the newspaper covers the intense fighting in Berlin, highlighting the humanitarian crisis faced by residents who lack water and must risk their lives to gather it from the Spree River and canals. The formation of Freikorps units, including women, signifies total mobilization. Destruction in the city is severe, with the government quarter completely devastated by Soviet artillery. Edw. af Sandeberg reports on the lethal artillery bombardments compelling both civilians and soldiers to seek underground shelter, resulting in catastrophic losses on both sides.¹⁴⁰

Franzen's article "Rysslands marsch västerut" (Russia's march westward) in issue no. 65 discusses the unexpected advance of the Red Army into western Germany following Germany's defeat. Contrary to expectations that the Soviet occupation would stop at the Elbe, troops crossed into Saxony and encountered American forces, effectively dividing the Third Reich. The Soviets also launched offensives in northern Germany, capturing Stettin and moving towards the Baltic coast, which raised the prospect of advancing into Schleswig-Holstein and potentially liberating Denmark. The author highlights the uncertainty surrounding Allied occupation agreements and stresses the significance of the events in northern Germany for Scandinavia.¹⁴¹

In issue no. 68 of 1 May, it is reported that Soviet troops captured the Reichstag building and raised the victory banner over it. In addition, the main post office

¹³⁹ *Smålandsposten* 1945. Ryssarna ha trängt in i Berlins försvarsgördel. April 21. no. 61, p. 10

¹⁴⁰ Sandström, Dag 1945. Ryssarna slåss vid Stettiner Bahnhof i Berlin. In *Smålandsposten*. April 24. no. 63, p. 12

¹⁴¹ Franzén, Gunnar 1945. Rysslands marsch västerut. In *Smålandsposten*. April 28. no. 65, p. 12 - 13

building, which housed the Ministry of the Interior, was taken, along with up to 200 blocks in the central part of Berlin.¹⁴²

In issue no. 69 of 5 May, a description of Berlin by a Soviet correspondent is published. The city lies in ruins, and in some places fires are still burning. Throughout the streets of the capital one can see German prisoners of war now engaged in cleanup work, while former Russian prisoners of war walk around observing, roles having been reversed.¹⁴³

On 10 May, issue no. 72 of the newspaper reports the conclusion of the war in Europe, detailing the ceremony in Berlin's Karlshorst where Germany's unconditional surrender was signed, led by Marshal Georgy Zhukov. This act symbolized Germany's complete military defeat and dispelled the illusion of an "invincible army." Additionally, Stalin's radio address pronounced the finality of Germany's defeat, highlighted the Soviet people's role in the victory, and proclaimed a new era of peace in Europe, affirming that the USSR sought no destruction of the German populace. Celebrations included an artillery salute.¹⁴⁴

5.2 Socialdemokraten/Morgontidningen

5.2.1 Operation Barbarossa

The *Socialdemokraten* issue of 23 June 1941 reports on the extensive German invasion of the Soviet Union, detailing the deployment of approximately 200 divisions along a front line of 3,000 kilometers from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea.¹⁴⁵ It includes a Berlin report about a German airborne landing in Odessa and mentions the Soviet Union's declaration of mobilization and martial law in its European territories, along with the imposition of a curfew and blackout in major cities.¹⁴⁶ The article also notes uprisings in the Baltic states that allied with German forces and reproduces a German diplomatic note accusing the USSR

¹⁴² *Smålandsposten* 1945. Riksdagshuset erövrat. May 1. no. 67, p. 10 - 11

¹⁴³ *Smålandsposten* 1945. I dagens Berlin. May 5. no. 69, p. 11

¹⁴⁴ *Smålandsposten* 1945. Slutakten i Tysklands underkastelse ägde rum i går natt. May 10. no. 72, p. 10

¹⁴⁵ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. De tyska arméernas mål, flottbaser och kornbod. June 23. no. 167, p. 7

¹⁴⁶ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. June 23. no. 167, p. 1, 6

of sabotage, aggressive actions in the Balkans, and troop concentration threatening Germany.¹⁴⁷

In the issue of 24 June, the economic situation of the USSR is analyzed in the context of the war. Russia is described as a country extremely rich in resources, with vast reserves of gold, coal, oil, and iron. However, the state of the economy is depicted as dire due to bureaucratization, shortages of raw materials, and the poor quality of industrial output. Analysts argue that the inability of the state apparatus to manage resources under wartime conditions could prove catastrophic.¹⁴⁸ The newspaper also cites the German press, which portrays the invasion of the Soviet Union as preventive in nature and compares it to a crusade.¹⁴⁹

In the issue of 26 June, the newspaper continues to cover the first days of the German attack on the USSR and the outbreak of war between Finland and the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁰ German high command speak of a successful and rapid Wehrmacht advance on the Eastern Front: the Red Army was taken by surprise, suffered heavy losses—especially in aviation—and German forces penetrated deep into Soviet territory.¹⁵¹ Soviet information office reports, by contrast, emphasize the Red Army's stubborn resistance, successful counterattacks, heavy enemy losses, and intense fighting.¹⁵²

In the issue of 28 June, the German command declares that “the first five days of operations have shown that the Soviet armed forces were prepared for an offensive against Central Europe.” At the same time, the Wehrmacht continues to destroy Soviet armored vehicles and capture large amounts of matériel. Berlin also reports on European sympathies for the “crusade against Bolshevism,”

¹⁴⁷ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Berlin beskyller Sovjet för sabotage och falskt spel. June 23. no. 167, p. 8

¹⁴⁸ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Sovjetrysslands ekonomiska ställning. June 24. no. 168, p. 2

¹⁴⁹ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Tyska kommentarer: Sovjet planerade angrepp när Tyskland försvagats. June 24. no. 168, p. 5

¹⁵⁰ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Krigsförklaring Finland - Sovjet. June 26. no. 169, p. 1

¹⁵¹ Lindqvist, Eric 1941. Fantastisk kommuniké bebådas från Berlin. In *Socialdemokraten*. June 26. no. 169, p. 7

¹⁵² *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Intensivt motstånd, rapporterar Moskva. June 26. no. 169, p. 7

including in countries that had previously shown sympathy toward the Soviet Union.¹⁵³

In the issue of 29 June, a clash between German assault troops and Soviet fortifications is described as a severe test. According to the text, Red Army soldiers displayed fierce resistance and fanaticism in defense. Such determination, a Soviet prisoner reportedly explained, was due to a ban on surrender under threat of execution, as well as the belief that the Germans subjected all prisoners to a painful death.¹⁵⁴

5.2.2 Battle of Moscow

In an article from 1 October 1941 discusses the impact of the Russian winter on Wehrmacht operations. Contends that the winter will not result in disaster and that the German army is prepared. For the first time, military circles in Berlin acknowledge that the campaign against the USSR will extend beyond the winter into the next year, with a stabilization of the front expected before resuming combat operations. This suggests an implicit admission that a quick victory over the Soviet Union has not been achieved.¹⁵⁵

In the issue of 4 October, a speech by Hitler is reported during which the Nazi leader stated that Germany had underestimated the scale of the Red Army's military preparations and that only a preventive strike had saved Europe from destruction. Hitler declared that the enemy had been broken and would no longer be able to recover, rejected historical parallels, and presented the war as forced and fateful for Europe.¹⁵⁶

In the issue of 9 October, the offensive against Moscow is described as having reached a critical phase: Wehrmacht units are 150 kilometers from the Soviet

¹⁵³ Lindqvist, Eric 1941. Korståg mot bolsjevismen förenar Europa i kampen. In *Socialdemokraten*, June 28. no. 171, p. 6

¹⁵⁴ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Stalinlinjens bunkers försvaras med fanatism. June 29. no. 172, p. 6

¹⁵⁵ Lindqvist, Eric 1941. Vintern kommer att stoppa det tyska fälttåget i öster. In *Socialdemokraten*. October 1. no. 266, p. 6 - 7

¹⁵⁶ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Kriget i öster har gått programenligt. October 4. no. 269, p. 6

capital, and Timoshenko's army is under threat of encirclement and destruction.¹⁵⁷

Soviet sources report fierce resistance, large-scale tank battles, and enormous losses.¹⁵⁸

The issue of 8 November reports on the parade held in Moscow on the anniversary of the October Revolution and Stalin's speech, in which the Soviet leader spoke of the serious situation and the heroic defense of the country. Stalin also stated that the Soviet Union was in a better position than in 1918, as the country had become more developed and now had allies.¹⁵⁹

In the issue of 4 December, German sources report increased pressure on Moscow and tactical victories by the Wehrmacht.¹⁶⁰ Fierce fighting is taking place around Moscow: in some areas the Germans achieve successes, while in others the Red Army launches counterattacks, recaptures settlements, and inflicts losses on enemy tank units. "The enemy is retreating westward under the pressure of Russian cavalry and Russian tanks."¹⁶¹

On December 7, reports indicate a heightened intensity in the Battle of Moscow, with German forces positioned 60 kilometers from the Soviet capital. New Wehrmacht reinforcements, including a tank division, a motorized division, and two infantry divisions, have arrived. In the Volokolamsk area, troops led by Rokossovsky are actively engaged in combat, while German assaults near Mozhaisk have been repelled. In the Tula sector, the Germans have disrupted the Moscow–Tula railway, leading to ongoing mixed-result fighting.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Moskva hotas starkt, läget är allvarligt. October 9. no. 274, p. 1

¹⁵⁸ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. London: Läget är mycket allvarligt. October 9. no. 274, p. 6

¹⁵⁹ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Stalin: Tyskland blöder och står inför katastrof. November 8. no. 304, p. 6

¹⁶⁰ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Berlin: Moskvatrycket ökar trots segt ryskt motstånd. December 4. no. 330, p. 6

¹⁶¹ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Moskva: Tyskarna retiera, utrymma Taganrog. December 4. no. 330, p. 6

¹⁶² *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Moskvvaslaget har tilltagit i våldsamhet. December 7. no. 333, p. 6

In the issue of 9 December, reports from Berlin state that winter has constrained German operations and that even ideal military technology cannot help. “General Winter has won a victory along the entire front in Russia!”¹⁶³

On 29 December, it was reported that the fighting around Moscow has alleviated the threat of enemy capture, with advances pushing the enemy back 68 to 98 kilometers. Significant military trophies have been acquired. General Konev's troops are continuing their offensive. Despite the Germans reinforcing defenses with auxiliary personnel, this tactic has been ineffective. Additionally, local peasants armed with captured German weapons are actively participating in the fighting alongside regular forces.¹⁶⁴

5.2.3 Battle of Stalingrad

In *Socialdemokraten*, issue no. 227 of 23 August 1942, the article “Oljeområdet Grosny nästa mål i väster” (The Grozny oil field is the next target in the west) was published. It outlines the objectives of the Wehrmacht's next operations: the capture of Black Sea ports and the oil fields of the Caucasus. Stalingrad is identified as a strategic objective whose capture would have greater consequences than the occupation of the Caucasus itself.¹⁶⁵

In issue no. 239 of 4 September, it is reported that the Battle of Stalingrad had become one of the fiercest engagements of the year. The Wehrmacht employed “wave” tactics, throwing about 200 tanks into battle every three hours following extremely intense two-hour artillery barrages.¹⁶⁶ German armored units captured an important height south of the city and immediately turned it into a fortified strongpoint. All Soviet attempts to recapture the position failed.¹⁶⁷

In issue no. 241 (6 September), Stalingrad is reported to have remained in Red Army hands after two weeks of extremely heavy fighting. About one million

¹⁶³ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Vintern har tvingat tyskarna att stoppa det ryska fälttåget. December 9. no. 335, p. 1

¹⁶⁴ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Hotet mot Moskva fullständigt avvärjt. December 29. no. 353, p. 5

¹⁶⁵ *Socialdemokraten* 1942. Oljeområdet Grosny nästa mål i väster. August 23. no. 227, p. 7

¹⁶⁶ *Socialdemokraten* 1942. v. Bock vräker fram sina stridsvagnar. September 4. no. 239, p. 6

¹⁶⁷ *Socialdemokraten* 1942. Tyska pansarförband intaga viktig höjd. September 4. no. 239, p. 6

people defended the city, while the Wehrmacht used 50 divisions and roughly 2,000 tanks.¹⁶⁸ A Berlin correspondent notes that the Germans recognized the immense difficulty of capturing a city where every building was a fortress. German command praised Soviet war industry, stating that its output made Anglo-American aid seem minor.¹⁶⁹ The issue also describes an exhibition in occupied Oslo portraying Soviet life as brutal and dehumanized, where Quisling denounced Bolshevism as a threat and praised Germany and Hitler as Europe's saviors.¹⁷⁰

In issue no. 244 of 9 September, Moscow's view is reported, stating that the situation in Stalingrad for the defenders had improved following the transfer of reserves.¹⁷¹ The German side claims that no significant changes had occurred.¹⁷² The newspaper publishes Churchill's speech in which the British Prime Minister mentioned his visit to Moscow. He said that Russia was lucky to have a leader like Stalin. He praised the Soviet leader as "a powerful personality, ideally suited to turbulent times," highlighting his indomitable will, courage, straightforwardness, and distinctive sense of humor.¹⁷³

In *Morgontidningen*, issue no. 321 of 25 November 1942, a decisive tank battle near Stalingrad is reported, which led to the encirclement of German forces besieging the city. In the "cauldron" between the Don and the Volga, an estimated 300,000–400,000 Axis soldiers were trapped, cut off from supplies and retreat routes. In London, the operation is considered a turning point in the overall course of the war, and further Soviet offensives are expected, including in the Caucasus.¹⁷⁴ Germany acknowledges breaches in its defenses but declares its intention to hold its positions.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ *Socialdemokraten* 1942. En miljon ryssar försvara Stalingrad. September 6. no. 241, p. 6

¹⁶⁹ *Socialdemokraten* 1942. Bolsjevikerna ha förvandlat vartenda hus till fästning. September 6. no. 241, p. 6

¹⁷⁰ *Socialdemokraten* 1942. Skräckexpo om Sovjet öppnad i Oslo. September 6. no. 241, p. 6

¹⁷¹ *Socialdemokraten* 1942. Läget förbättrat, meddelar Moskva. September 9. no. 244, p. 1

¹⁷² *Socialdemokraten* 1942. Berlin: Ingen ändring i Stalingradslaget. September 9. no. 244, p. 7

¹⁷³ *Socialdemokraten* 1942. Churchills mest optimistiska tal. September 9. no. 244, p. 1, 6

¹⁷⁴ *Morgontidningen* 1942. 3 axeldivisioner tagna, ny stor terrängvinst. November 25. no. 321, p. 1, 6

¹⁷⁵ Ollén 1942. Berlin: På något sätt kommer vi att klara motståndarna. In *Morgontidningen* November 25. no. 321, p. 6

In issue no. 30 of 1 February 1943, it is reported that the Battle of Stalingrad had ended: Moscow announces the destruction of German forces in Stalingrad and the capture of Field Marshal Paulus.¹⁷⁶

5.2.4 Battle of Berlin

In issue no. 102 of 17 April 1945, it is reported that a powerful Soviet offensive against Berlin had begun: artillery fire could already be clearly heard in the eastern suburbs of Berlin, and fierce fighting was escalating into a full-scale battle. Up to two million Soviet soldiers were taking part in the offensive.¹⁷⁷

In issue no. 104 of 19 April, the newspaper covers the continuing Soviet assault on Berlin. The German side acknowledges that the battle may become the bloodiest of the entire war, and military commentator von Hammer stated that “the Battle of Berlin has reached its climax.” The Soviet army is heavily shelling the city, and its fire is compared to a hurricane sweeping away anti-tank obstacles and bunker systems.¹⁷⁸

In issue no. 107 of 22 April, it is reported that Soviet troops had entered Berlin and its suburbs. Soviet artillery continues to bombard the city, destroying the government quarter.¹⁷⁹ There is also news of a speech by Goebbels in which he called on the capital’s residents to resist the enemy. “The Mongolian storm will be shattered against the city walls,” the propaganda minister concluded.¹⁸⁰

In issue no. 111 of 26 April, the newspaper reports that the Red Army had completely sealed the ring around Berlin. By order of Stalin, the forces of Zhukov and Konev linked up west of Potsdam, cutting off all routes of retreat. Fierce street fighting and underground battles are raging in the city. Berlin is being rapidly destroyed, the civilian population has become a helpless witness, and

¹⁷⁶ *Morgontidningen* 1943. Våldsam nattlig raid mot Hamburg. February 1. no. 30, p. 1

¹⁷⁷ *Morgontidningen* 1945. Fruktansvärd rysk övermakt på sjutton mils front. April 17. no. 102, p. 6

¹⁷⁸ *Morgontidningen* 1945. Fantastisk eldorkan bryter tyska skyddsställningarna. April 19. no. 104, p. 6

¹⁷⁹ *Morgontidningen* 1945. Granatregn i Hamburg, strid i förstäderna. April 22. no. 107, p. 1

¹⁸⁰ *Morgontidningen* 1945. Goebbels proklamerar strid om varje hus: Berlin ej öppen stad, var man måste stanna. April 22. no. 107, p. 6

streams of refugees are moving eastward toward Soviet lines. According to estimates, tens of thousands of civilians have been killed.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ *Morgontidningen* 1945. Tyska flyktingströmmen går i östlig riktning. April 26. no. 111, p. 6

6 Analysis and discussion

The main aim of this study is to examine the coverage of events on the Eastern Front during the Second World War from 1941 to 1945. The research focuses on four key events: Operation Barbarossa, the Battle of Moscow, the Battle of Stalingrad, and the fall of Berlin. The source material for this paper consists of the Swedish press, specifically the newspapers *Smålandsposten* and *Socialdemokraten*, which was later renamed *Morgonstidningen* during the war. This section presents analysis and discussion based on qualitative text analysis and framing theory.

In *Smålandsposten*, the Soviet Union during the first days of Operation Barbarossa was portrayed as a structurally bad governed state with impoverished population that was expected to suffer defeat in the war and . In the newspaper's coverage, the Soviet Union is presented not as Germany's equal opponent, but as a system on the verge of collapse and disintegration. Franzén offers explanations for the Soviet failures in the early days of the war, which he attributes to the inefficiency of the Soviet economic odel as well as to the harsh living conditions faced by Soviet citizens.¹⁸² There is also an analysis of the state of the Red Army, which can be described as an "incomplete modernization." The army is depicted as a weakened structure as a result of purges, with an officer corps lacking the necessary level of training. Positive qualities are nevertheless highlighted, such as professional military commanders (Zhukov and Timoshenko), but these appear more as exceptions than as signs of systemic strength. The contrast between the personal bravery of soldiers and the inefficiency of the structure is emphasized.¹⁸³ At the same time, the state is portrayed as a threat to the European order, including to Scandinavia and Sweden in particular.¹⁸⁴

Even when the newspaper adopts a relatively neutral tone in its reporting, the selection of sources (frequent use of German communiqués), headlines, and

¹⁸² Franzén, Gunnar 1941. Ryskt kaos?. In *Smålandsposten*. July 1. no. 102, p. 8 - 9

¹⁸³ Franzén, Gunnar 1941. Röda krigsmän. In *Smålandsposten*. June 28. no. 101, p. 8 - 9

¹⁸⁴ *Smålandsposten* 1941. Fredens ö i krigets hav. June 26. no. 100, p. 5

interpretations creates an impression of the inevitability of the Soviet state's defeat in the war. Thus, the USSR appears not as an active actor in the confrontation, but rather as an object of external pressure, incapable of mounting effective resistance.

An equally important role in shaping the image of the Soviet Union is played by the newspaper's editor-in-chief, Gunnar Franzén, who writes his own column on international affairs in every issue. His articles function as an interpretative core, while the news items provide the informational background. His columns reveal a negative attitude toward the Soviet Union and the ruling regime in that country. Thus, in early 1943, in the article "Dramat i Öster", he writes about a system of slave-like and brutal exploitation of citizens in the Soviet Union which, nevertheless, sustains the Soviet system.¹⁸⁵ His texts reveal a critical stance toward the Soviet regime, yet this criticism is not extended indiscriminately to the population. He describes with horror the destruction of Stalingrad inflicted by the Germans and the harsh fate of its inhabitants.¹⁸⁶ This form of negative relation to Russia and anti-Sovietism is more appropriately compared to the stance taken by the newspaper *Jönköpings-Posten*, whose reporting was placed in the context of the Winter War and the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact.¹⁸⁷ At the same time, the editor-in-chief's views do not contradict the newspaper's overall line but rather articulate it more clearly and consistently. His texts should therefore be seen not as a personal opinion, but as a representative expression of *Smålandsposten*'s position.

In *Socialdemokraten*, by contrast, the Soviet Union is presented as a potentially powerful state, possessing rich natural and human resources that could prove decisive under conditions of total war. However, this strength is simultaneously accompanied by an emphasis on shortcomings in governance: bureaucratization, low product quality, and weak coordination within the state apparatus.¹⁸⁸ As a result, the Soviet Union appears not as a weak state, but as one with contradictory

¹⁸⁵ Franzén, Gunnar 1942. Dramat i öster. In *Smålandsposten*. January 8. no. 3, p. 8 - 9

¹⁸⁶ Franzén, Gunnar 1942. Dramat i Volga. In *Smålandsposten*. September 26. no. 135, p. 10 - 11

¹⁸⁷ Kihlblom 2019, p. 35 - 36

¹⁸⁸ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Sovjetrysslands ekonomiska ställning. June 24. no. 168, p. 2

potential, where structural deficiencies could undermine the effective use of its objective advantages.

The German view that the invasion of the USSR was a preemptive strike is more fully developed in *Socialdemokraten* than in *Smålandsposten*. This is clearly evident in the June 23, 1941, issue, which cites German accusations, as well as the German report in the June 28 issue about the Red Army's readiness to attack Central Europe. In the early stages of the conflict, this framing softens the image of Germany as an aggressor.¹⁸⁹ ¹⁹⁰ Simultaneously strengthens the perception of the USSR as a potential source of threat by presenting the war as a forced conflict in which the Soviet Union is partially blamed for its outbreak.

The repeated use of German military communiqués as a source of information contributes to the formation of a stable interpretive framework in which German data is perceived as plausible until specific military events—such as the failure of the Moscow offensive or the encirclement of German forces at Stalingrad—undermine this framework. In the newspaper *Smålandsposten*, during the first days of the invasion, it may seem that German reports of victories are presented as *fait accompli*, while Soviet data are relegated to the background.

Socialdemokraten also regularly uses German military reports, but their function in the text differs from that in *Smålandsposten*. In several cases, Soviet reports of resistance to the Red Army are indirectly corroborated by German sources. Thus, the June 29, 1941, issue describes the assault on Soviet fortifications, during which the Red Army soldiers holding the positions defended themselves with fanaticism, creating serious difficulties for the Wehrmacht soldiers. This presentation contributes to a more complex image of the Soviet Union, in which the Red Army is portrayed not only as the victim of a surprise attack but also as an adversary capable of organized and persistent resistance, even in an

¹⁸⁹ *Socialdemokraten* 1941. Berlin beskyller Sovjet för sabotage och falskt spel. June 23. no. 167, p. 8

¹⁹⁰ Lindqvist, Eric 1941. Korståg mot bolsjevismen förenar Europa i kampen. In *Socialdemokraten*, June 28. no. 171, p. 6

unfavourable strategic situation. However, over time, this ideological component fades into the background.

Despite the fact that in the early period of the war on the Eastern Front the image of the Soviet Union was constructed around expectations of its defeat, the subsequent course of the war and the military successes of the Red Army undermined such an interpretation. Even the critically minded editor Franzén wrote in his column during the Battle of Stalingrad in November that Stalin had chosen a favorable moment to launch the offensive. However, this transformation occurred slowly and fragmentarily, and the irreversible turning point became the Red Army's victory at Stalingrad. This corresponds with Axel Moberg's study of the Swedish press during the Second World War, which likewise underwent a similar transformation.¹⁹¹

Franzén's article "Rysslands marsch västerut" is an example of the expression of certain concerns regarding the advance of Soviet troops. He emphasizes the strategic consequences for the Scandinavian countries and the unpredictability of Allied agreements on occupation zones. The Soviet Union was increasingly portrayed as a potential factor of postwar power in the region, rather than merely as a military ally against Nazism. This demonstrates that concerns about Soviet expansion were already being discussed in the Swedish press in the spring of 1945, although Roslyng-Jensen notes that criticism of the Soviet Union intensified in 1946–1947.¹⁹² This also corresponds to the expectation of increased Soviet influence in Scandinavia because of the Soviet military presence.¹⁹³

It should be noted that a negative attitude toward the Soviet Union may have influenced how events in Berlin in the second half of spring 1945 were portrayed, when the Soviet army was storming the German capital. Both *Smålandsposten* and *Morgontidningen* write about the humanitarian catastrophe that engulfed the city's inhabitants. One issue of *Morgontidningen* reports the deaths of 65,000

¹⁹¹ Moberg 2015, p. 178 – 181, 224

¹⁹² Roslyng-Jensen 2012, p. 532

¹⁹³ Roslyng-Jensen 2012, p. 527

civilians. Responsibility for these deaths is most likely attributed to the Red Army, which carried out large-scale artillery bombardments that inevitably affected civilian homes. In this case, the reader is more inclined to sympathize with unarmed civilians caught in the inferno of a clash between two repressive and brutal political systems. Such framing contributes to shifting the focus away from the military defeat of Nazi Germany toward the suffering of the civilian population.

In conclusion, the results indicate that the portrayal of the Soviet Union in the Swedish press was neither fixed nor consistent. The coverage of the four key events was shaped by the use of official military communiqués, editorial commentary and shifting interpretative frames. It changed over time in response to military developments as well as to the political orientation and editorial structure of each newspaper. While both newspapers initially reflected German military dominance, *Smålandsposten* framed the Soviet Union as structurally problematic, whereas *Socialdemokraten* presented a more ambivalent image, emphasizing both resource strength and structural deficiencies. The turning point at Stalingrad marked a significant shift in framing, transforming the image of the USSR from a collapsing state to a decisive military actor. By the final phase of the war, the focus increasingly shifted toward humanitarian suffering during the Battle of Berlin, illustrating how earlier attitudes continued to influence interpretation.

7 Conclusion

The results of the analysis show that the newspapers represent different images of the Soviet Union throughout the course of the fighting on the Eastern Front of the Second World War. In *Smålandsposten*, at the beginning of the war the USSR was portrayed as a bad governed state with an inefficient economic model and a poorly combat-capable army. The image of the Soviet state in *Socialdemokraten* is presented in a more ambivalent manner. On the one hand, the main newspaper of the Swedish Social Democrats depicts the country as a potentially strong state with enormous resources; on the other, as a structure suffering from serious governance problems. *Socialdemokraten* also gives broad coverage to the German version of the causes of the war.

As the war progressed, the newspapers increasingly acknowledged the Red Army's ability to resist German forces. The turning point was the Battle of Stalingrad, after which even critically inclined authors recognized the strategic and military competence of the Soviet side. In the final phase of the war, the reporting on the Battle of Berlin further illustrates how earlier attitudes toward the Soviet Union influenced the framing of events, with increased emphasis on civilian suffering and humanitarian catastrophe. Overall, the study demonstrates that political orientation and changing military realities played a significant role in shaping how the Soviet Union was represented in the Swedish press.

8 List of sources and literature

8.1 Empirical material

1. *Smålandsposten* 1941-06-26 – 1945-05-10
2. *Socialdemokraten* (Later *Morgontidningen*) 1941-06-23 – 1945-05-26

8.2 Literature

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Appendix 1



Ohyggliga scener i blixtkriget i öster

Stridsvagnar tillintetgörs av luftvärnet

Tryskigt rapporterar nya händelser...

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har luftvärnet i östern tillintetgjort flera tyska stridsvagnar. Detta har skett genom att luftvärnet har skjutit ner dem med sina tunga kanoner. Detta har skett i olika delar av östern, där tyska stridsvagnar har försökt avancera mot sovjetiska linjer. Luftvärnet har varit mycket effektivt i sina försök att förstöra dessa stridsvagnar, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.



En tysk soldat i en av de många grävt diken som byggts i östern.

Ryska kavallerichocker mot tyska pansarvagnar

"Preis som i Polen", säger tysk militär. Stora krigsrapporter kommer i dag.

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har tyska kavallerichocker mot sovjetiska stridsvagnar lett till stora förluster för tyskarna. Detta har skett i olika delar av östern, där tyska kavallerichocker har försökt avancera mot sovjetiska linjer. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.



En tysk soldat i en av de många grävt diken som byggts i östern.

Azokonsulatens i USA personal hemföres 10 juli

Personer som varit i kontakt med tyskarna...

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har personalen från det tyska konsulatet i USA blivit hemförd den 10 juli. Detta har skett genom att personalen har blivit utskickad till andra delar av Tyskland. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.

Lång konfession Eden-Winert

Eden-Winert har varit i kontakt med tyskarna...

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har Eden-Winert gjort en lång konfession. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.

General Gumbert skjuts till Bagdad

General Gumbert har varit i kontakt med tyskarna...

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har General Gumbert blivit skjuts till Bagdad. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.

Lwowområdet hålles mot tyska angreppen

Infanteriregementet försvårades av ryska kavalleridivisionen vid Piat.

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har infanteriregementet i Lwowområdet hållit mot tyska angreppen. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.

Franskt tankförty för lämna Bernadus

Franskt tankförty har varit i kontakt med tyskarna...

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har franskt tankförty lämnat Bernadus. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.

Kolonisationen i Finland har avbrutits

Finland har varit i kontakt med tyskarna...

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har kolonisationen i Finland avbrutits. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.

Tyska pressen om den svenska transiferingen

"Varför blundar England Sverige besträ"

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har den svenska transiferingen lett till stora förluster för tyskarna. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.

Stalintinjens bunkers försvaras med fanatism

Bårdare strider än i Maginotlinjen.

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har Stalintinjens bunkers försvarats med fanatism. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.

Tyska pressen om den svenska transiferingen

"Varför blundar England Sverige besträ"

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har den svenska transiferingen lett till stora förluster för tyskarna. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.

Tyska pressen om den svenska transiferingen

"Varför blundar England Sverige besträ"

BRISK BEKÄMPLING
Enligt den tyska pressen har den svenska transiferingen lett till stora förluster för tyskarna. Detta har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna, vilket har lett till stora förluster för tyskarna.

